

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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P 051700Z FEB 75

FM AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1007

INFO AMCMBASSY BOGOTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MEDELLIN 0038/1

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CO, PINT

SUBJECT: ANTIOQUIAN POLITICAL LEADERS DISCUSS CURRENT COLOMBIAN
POLITICAL SITUATION AND OUTLOOK

REF: (A) MEDELLIN 0031 (B) 0035

SUMMARY: THE CONSULATE HAS CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF LEADING ANTIOQUIAN PRACTICING POLITICIANS TO ASCERTAIN THEIR EVALUATIONS OF THE COLOMBIAN POLITICAL SITUATION. THE POLITICIANS EXPRESSED THEIR VIEWS ON (A) THE PERFORMANCE OF THE LOPEZ ADMIN TO DATE; (B) CURRENT POLITICAL PARTY POWER RELATIONSHIPS; (C) PRELIMINARY SPECULATION CONCERNING 1978; (D) THE CURRENT AND PROSPECTIVE PUBLIC ORDER SITUATION; (E) THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ANTIOQUIAN AND MEDELLIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION; AND (F) PROSPECTS FOR HEALING THE SCHISMS CURRENTLY AFFECTING BOTH THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PARTIES IN ANTIOQUIA. END SUMMARY

1. THE CONSULATE HAS JUST CONCLUDED A THREE WEEK PROGRAM OF CONTACTING 28 LEADING ANTIOQUIAN GOVERNMENT, POLITICAL AND LABOR FIGURES WITH THE PURPOSE OF OBTAINING THEIR EVALUATIONS AND IMPRESSIONS OF THE CURRENT COLOMBIAN POLITICAL SCENE AS THE LOPEZ ADMIN APPROACHES THE SIX MONTH MARK. THE CONSULATE SOUGHT OUT THESE
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WORKING POLITICIANS' VIEWS ON A NUMBER OF POLITICAL FACTORS LISTED

IN THE SUMMARY. THIS REPORT DISCUSSES THE EVALUATIONS OFFERED BY THE POLITICIANS DURING THE INTERVIEWS. THE REFERENCED MESSAGES GIVE FULLER TREATMENT TO, RESPECTIVELY, LABOR LEADER CONCERN OVER CSTC ADVANCES AND THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES' NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND STRATEGY.

2. LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION PERFORMANCE -- A VERY SUBSTANTIAL MAJORITY OF THOSE INTERVIEWED GAVE THE LOPEZ ADMIN GOOD-TO-HIGH MARKS WITH MANY CONSERVATIVES JOINING IN THE APPROVAL. A PARTICULAR SURPRISE WAS JUAN ZULETA FERRER (CONSERVATIVE DIRECTOR OF EL COLOMBIANO) WHO SAID THAT INDUSTRY IS ADJUSTING TO THE NEW ECONOMIC DECREES AND PREDICTED AN ECONOMIC UPTURN BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR. ZULETA HAD A LONG SESSION IN EARLY JANUARY WITH QTE OLD FRIEND END QTE

RODRIGO BOTERO AND WAS OBVIOUSLY VERY IMPRESSED. ZULETA EXPRESSED HIS CONFIDENCE THAT THE ADMIN WILL MAKE FURTHER NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS IN ITS ECONOMIC POLICIES OVER THE COMING MONTHS. ZULETA'S VIEWS REPRESENT A REMARKABLE TURNAROUND FOR A MAN WHO LAST NOVEMBER WAS EXPRESSING REAL ALARM BOTH PRIVATELY AND IN PRINT OVER THE DIRECTION OF THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT. TWO OTHER CONSERVATIVES BASICALLY FAVORABLE TO THE LOPEZ ADMIN PERFORMANCE ARE OCTAVIO TRUJILLO, MEMBER OF THE ANTIOQUIAN CONSERVATIVE DIRECTORATE (DCA), AND CONSERVATIVE SEN MARIO GIRALDO. ALL OF THE LIBERALS INTERVIEWED EXPRESSED BASIC APPROVAL OF THE LOPEZ POLICIES, ALTHOUGH SOME HAD RESERVATIONS ON ONE OR ANOTHER SPECIFIC MEASURE.

3. CONSERVATIVE SEN MARIANO OSPINA SAID HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THE LOPEZ GOV HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE AND BELIEVES IT HAS LOST SUPPORT FROM ALL SECTORS BECAUSE OF INFLATION AND SLOWER PRODUCTION. HE CONSIDERED

IT A MISTAKE FOR THE LOPEZ GOV TO PROMISE TO CHANGE THE COUNTRY WITHIN 100 DAYS. HE SAID THE FUTURE DOES NOT LOOK ENCOURAGING. LOPEZ HAS THE PROBLEM OF LABOR UNREST, MUCH OF IT STIMULATED BY FOREIGN INFLUENCES, AND FURTHER PRODUCTION DECLINES IF THE ADMIN DOES NOT ACT SOON TO STIMULATE PRODUCTION. ANOTHER (SOMEWHAT LESS) CRITICAL CONSERVATIVE IS GUILLERMO VELEZ URRETA, WHO IS A MEMBER OF BOTH THE DCA AND THE NATIONAL DCN. THE ONE ANAPO POLITICIAN
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CONSULTED, REP. ORLANDO DURANGO HERNANDEZ, WAS SHARPLY CRITICAL OF THE ADMIN ON THE INFLATION ISSUE BUT IN FAVOR OF THE INCOME TAX AND PRESUMPTIVE INCOME REFORMS. THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES INTERVIEWED, INCLUDING THE MOVEMENT'S LEADER J. EMILIO VALDERRAMA, EXPRESSED DISAPPROVAL OF THE LOPEZ PERFORMANCE, A POSITION CONSISTENT

WITH THE MOVEMENT'S PROFESSED STRATEGY OF ASSUMING AN OPPOSITION ROLE HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT.

4. CURRENT POLITICAL PARTY POWER RELATIONSHIPS -- ALMOST ALL
OBSERVERS AGREED THAT THE LOPEZ ADMIN REMAINS VERY STRONG POLITICALLY,

ENJOYING THE BROAD SUPPORT OF THE LIBERALS, THE OPPOSITION
CONSERVATIVE PARTY, THE CONGRESS, THE MILITARY AND THE PUBLIC IN
GENERAL. EVEN THOSE WHO ARE CRITICAL OF THE LOPEZ PERFORMANCE
AND WHO CONSIDER THAT THE ADMIN HAS LOST SOME STRENGTH TENDED TO
AGREE THAT THE LOPEZ GOV EVEN SO RETAINS BROAD SUPPORT. WHILE
CONFIDENT OF THE POLITICAL STRENGTH OF THE GOVERNMENT, LIBERALS ARE
NEVERTHELESS CONCERNED OVER THE LACK OF LEADERSHIP IN THE LIBERAL
PARTY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL WHICH THEY FEAR IS ENCOURAGING FACTIONALISM,

PARTICULARLY IN ANTIOQUIA, AS IS DISCUSSED BELOW. IT IS WELL KNOWN
THAT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS DELIBERATELY ADOPTED A POLICY
OF NOT CRITICIZING THE LOPEZ ADMIN. THE LIBERALS CONSULTED VIEW
THAT POLICY AS A NATURAL CONSEQUENCE OF CONSERVATIVE WEAKNESS
WHICH EFFECTIVELY PREVENTS THEM FROM CHALLENGING GOVERNMENT
PROGRAMS. THE CONSERVATIVES (OSPINA HERNANDEZ, ZULETA, VELEZ
URRETA) GENERALLY EXPRESSED THE LINE THAT IT IS THE CONSERVATIVES'
DEMOCRATIC DUTY TO SUPPORT THE PROGRAMS OF A PRESIDENT WHO RECEIVED AN

OVERWHELMING MANDATE FROM THE ELECTORATE, EVEN THOUGH THEY MAY
DISAGREE WITH SOME OF THE PROGRAMS. OTHER CONSERVATIVES (TRUJILLO,
GIRALDO) ADDED THE VARIATION THAT MANY OF THE ADMIN PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN

GOOD AND WORTHY OF CONSERVATIVE SUPPORT. THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES

(VALDERRAMA, SEN JUAN GOMEZ MARTINEZ) INDICATED THEY SEE THE
CONSERVATIVES AS BEING COWED BY THEIR 1974 DEFEAT AND UNWILLING TO
CRITICIZE THE ADMIN FOR FEAR OF LOSING FAVORS, JOBS AND PATRONAGE.
MOST OF THE POLITICIANS CONSULTED VIEW ANAPO AS A
SPENT POLITICAL FORCE; SOME BELIEVE IT WILL DISINTEGRATE FOLLOWING
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THE GENERAL'S RECENT DEATH. OTHERS BELIEVE IT WILL CONTINUE A
MINOR POLITICAL EXISTENCE PRIMARILY TO SERVE AS AN ELECTORAL
VEHICLE FOR ANAPO POLITICIANS. THE ANAPO REP (DURANGO) SEES ANAPO
AS RECOVERING FROM THE 1974 DEFEAT BECAUSE IT IS THE ONLY VIABLE
OPPOSITION FORCE IN COLOMBIAN POLITICS. WITH RESPECT TO THE
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES, OUTSIDE OF THEMSELVES, NO ONE SEEMS TO TAKE

THEM SERIOUSLY AS A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN PARTY POWER RELATIONSHIPS.

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5. PRELIMINARY SPECULATION CONCERNING 1978 -- ALMOST ALL OF THE POLITICIANS INDICATED IT IS TOO EARLY TO SPECULATE CONCERNING 1978-- AND THEN BEGAN EAGERLY TO DO JUST THAT. MOST SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT THE KEY TO 1978 POLITICAL PROSPECTS LIES IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE LOPEZ ADMIN: FOUR YEARS OF GOOD GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE ANY LIBERAL CANDIDATE UNBEATABLE IN 1978. SINCE MOST ALSO FEEL THAT THE LOPEZ ADMIN IS TURNING IN BASICALLY A GOOD PERFORMANCE, IT FOLLOWS THAT THE LIBERALS ARE CONSIDERED BY MOST AS VIRTUALLY A SURE THING IN 1978. INDEED SOME LIBERALS TALK CONFIDENTLY OF LIBERAL POLITICAL DOMINANCE LASTING OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS. MOST CONSERVATIVES CONSULTED CONCEDE THERE IS NO WAY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY CAN DEFEAT A UNITED LIBERAL PARTY IN 1978, THE WORD QTE UNITED END QTE BEING THE

QUALIFIER OVER WHICH THE CONSERVATIVES LOVE TO LET THEIR MINDS WANDER.

THEY LIKE TO SPECULATE OVER A TURBAY/CARLOS LLERAS SPLIT IN THE LIBERAL PARTY. SOME THEN ENVISION A LLERAS/CONSERVATIVE COALITION DEFEATING TURBAY, WHILE OTHERS SEE AN ATTRACTIVE CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE SUCH AS EX-PRES PASTRANA RUNNING AND WINNING AGAINST DIVIDED LLERAS AND TURBAY CANDIDACIES (THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES HAVE ESSENTIALLY THE SAME DREAM). INTERESTINGLY, NOT EVEN THE TWO BIGGEST ANTIOQUIAN ALVARISTAS OF 1974 (GUILLERMO VELEZ AND OCTAVIO TRUJILLO) BELIEVE THAT ALVARO GOMEZ COULD UNDER ANY CONCEIVABLE

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CIRCUMSTANCES BE A SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE IN 1978.

6. MOST LIBERALS HERE DO NOT BELIEVE THE LIBERAL PARTY WILL SPLIT IN 1978, AND THEREFORE CONSIDER THAT THE CONSERVATIVE SPECULATIONS ARE PIPEDREAMS. FOR THE MOST PART LIBERALS BELIEVE THAT TURBAY IS IN THE BEST POSITION TO GAIN THE PARTY NOMINATION AND DO NOT THINK THAT LLERAS WOULD BE ANY MORE WILLING TO SPLIT THE PARTY IN 1978 THAN HE WAS IN 1974. THERE IS NOT A GOOD DEAL OF LIBERAL ENTHUSIASM HERE FOR EITHER CANDIDATE: TURBAY BECAUSE HE HAS NEVER HAD MUCH OF A FOLLOWING IN ANTIOQUIA AND LLERAS BECAUSE OF HIS AGE AND HIS PERFORMANCE OVER THE PAST YEAR. A FEW LIBERALS (REP BERNARDO GUERRA, EX-SEN JORGE FERNANDEZ, DLA SEC GEN BERNARDO RUIZ) SEE A NEW FIGURE EMERGING IN THE LIBERAL PARTY AS THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE A FIGURE CREATED PERHAPS BY PRES LOPEZ TO EXTEND A LOPISTA-STYLE GOVERNMENT BEYOND 1978. OF COURSE, IT IS TOO EARLY TO SPECULATE...

7. PUBLIC ORDER -- MANY OF THOSE CONSULTED EXPRESSED SOME CONCERN ABOUT LABOR UNREST OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS AS A RESULT OF LEGITIMATE LABOR GRIEVANCES AND OF CSTC AGITATION. GOVERNOR OF ANTIOQUIA JAIME R.

ECHAVARRIA AND MEDELLIN MAYOR FEDERICO MORENO TOLD THE CONSULATE THEY HAVE BEEN GIVING SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE POTENTIAL FOR PUBLIC DISORDER. THUS FAR, HOWEVER, MEDELLIN HAS NOT SUFFERED ANY IMPORTANT CIVIL DISTURBANCES IN MONTHS, AND AUTHORITIES REPORTED THAT STREET CRIME ACTUALLY DECLINED SUBSTANTIALLY DURING DECEMBER. (THE RECENT MOISES FARBEROFF KIDNAPPING HAS PROVOKED SERIOUS CONCERN WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.)

LABOR LEADERS STATE THAT THEY EXPECT INCREASING CSTC - PROVOKED DISTURBANCES OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. SEVERAL OF THE POLITICAL LEADERS VOLUNTEERED THAT THEY HAVE HEARD STORIES OF ALLEGED MILITARY DISCONTENT WITH THE LOPEZ ADMIN, BUT THEY ALL DISMISSED THE RUMORS OUT-OF-HAND.

8. PERFORMANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS -- THERE IS A GENERAL CONSENSUS,

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SOME ALVARISTAS, THAT THE ANTIOQUIAN AND MEDELLIN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN UNINSPIRED AND INEFFECTIVE. GOV ECHAVARRIA, A PERSONAL FRIEND OF PRES LOPEZ, HAS BEEN MERCILESSLY CRITICIZED AND RIDICULED BY EL COLOMBIANO, AS BOTH FACTIONS OF THE

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PAPER'S OWNERSHIP FIND THEMSELVES IN RARE AGREEMENT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR. THE GENERAL CRITICISM AGAINST BOTH ADMINISTRATIONS IS THAT THEY ARE POLITICALLY AND ADMINISTRATIVELY INEXPERIENCED AND ARE SLOW LEARNERS, WHICH ABOUT COVERS IT. IN DEFENSE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, HOWEVER, WITH THE LOCAL POLITICAL FORCES SO FRAGMENTED IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO GAIN A CONSENSUS ON ANY LINE OF ACTION.

9. ANTIOQUIAN POLITICAL SCHISMS -- LIBERALS HERE ARE NOW SPLIT INTO A HALF-DOZEN SMALL GROUPS EACH FOLLOWING ITS OWN CAUDILLO. JOCKEYING FOR INFLUENCE ARE WILLIAM JARAMILLO, BERNARDO GUERRA, FABIO ECHEVERRI, CARLOS RESTREPO ARBELAEZ AND (FROM BOGOTA) HERNAN AGUDELO AND PERHAPS JORGE VALENCIA. IT IS GENERALLY AGREED THAT THE ANTIOQUIAN LIBERAL MESS CANNOT BE STRAIGHTENED OUT UNTIL SOMEONE ASSUMES THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE LIBERAL PARTY AND BEGINS TO LAY DOWN GUIDELINES AND ESTABLISH DISCIPLINE. A DEPARTMENTAL LIBERAL CONVENTION IS TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED FOR APRIL, BUT UNLESS THERE IS PRE-CONVENTION AGREEMENT ON DELEGATE SELECTION THE CONVENTION WOULD SERVE NO UNIFICATION PURPOSE. ON THE CONSERVATIVE SIDE THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES BROKE DEFINITELY WITH THE REGULAR CONSERVATIVE PARTY AFTER THE 1974 ELECTIONS AND ARE NOW ESTABLISHING THEIR OWN POLITICAL ORGANIZATION.

10. IN CONCLUSION, IT CAN BE SEEN FROM THE FOREGOING THAT THE ANTIOQUENOS HAVE LOST NONE OF THEIR OLD ZEST FOR POLITICS AND POLITICKING.
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